

SOMERSET COUNTY

On August 22, 1666, all that part of the Eastern Shore below the Nanticoke was erected into a new county called after Lady Mary Somerset, sister of the wife of Cecilius, Second Lord Baltimore.¹ This area and the adjoining land between the Nanticoke and the Choptank had been known as "the Eastern Shore" and had had a kind of provisional government for something over a year prior to the erection of Somerset and [a little later or perhaps at the same time] of Dorchester Counties.² Even a clerk, George Johnson, was appointed, and he kept the records of the county—they are still in existence—until the formal erection of Somerset County the next year, and the appointment of a regular clerk, Edmund Beauchamp.

Court at Thomas Poole's and Revell's Neck

This county court, if we may be permitted to call it that, was held at Thomas Poole's on the south side of the Back Creek of Manokin River. While individual sessions were held at various other places, the settled place of holding court appears to have continued to be at Thomas Poole's until sometime before August 1670, when it seems to have been located on the property of Randall Revell, called "Revell's Neck," on the Manokin River a mile or two below the mouth of King's Creek. No doubt this second seat of justice was only a private residence for on April 19, 1671, the Governor issued an order to the Justices of Somerset Court calling attention to the lack of a proper courthouse. The unusual delay was due to a difference of opinion as to the site of a permanent county seat, and the Governor appointed a commission of three members speedily to fix on a site. They agreed upon a tract of land owned by John Westlock on Trading Branch. But the issue then became more confused because in the meanwhile, Henry Smith had offered the Justices of the county both land and building if the court would guarantee to meet there permanently. The site he offered was at the head of Back Creek at Manokin on the plantation where Thomas Poole lately lived and where the courts of the County were formerly held. The Justices accepted the offer but some impediment now unknown must have arisen to prevent the fulfillment of this agreement.

Courthouse at Ilchester

In any case, on April 6, 1675, a warrant was issued for laying out fifty acres of land for the use of the county, to be known as Ilchester and lying on the southwest side of a branch of Manokin River called Smith's Branch. Some months later, the sheriff was ordered to levy for the erection of a courthouse and a prison; the funds raised were to be given to David Browne who would in turn pay the workmen. David Browne may, therefore, have been the builder. On June 15, 1676, it was ordered that two acres of ground never yet taken up and adjacent to the newly erected courthouse be confirmed to the county.

The New Courthouse Called "Unity"

Whatever happened to this courthouse is also mysterious: in November 1683, there is a reference in the Judgment records to a "new Court house called Unity." At that time the

¹ *Arch. of Md.*, III, 553-55.

² This account of the courthouses of Somerset County is in part adapted from Clayton Torrence, *Old Somerset on the Eastern Shore*, Richmond, Va., 1935; for the period before the

cutting off of Worcester County (1742) and after that, until 1905, from the address of H. Fillmore Lankford, delivered at the dedication of the present (built 1905) courthouse and found in the proceedings of the court, *Liber O.T.B. No. 1*, pp. 58-84.